

France edge
Slovakia for
world team goldSuso sizzler
salvages Milan
draw at Lazio

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DENVER NUGGETS STUN GOLDEN WARRIORS

Page 18



PARIS: Barcelona's Andre Gomes, centre, and Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen, left, save an attempt on goal during the Champion's League round of 16, first leg soccer match between Paris Saint Germain and Barcelona at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris, yesterday. — AP

DI MARIA STARS AS PSG STUN BARCELONA

PARIS: Angel Di Maria scored a brilliant brace on his birthday as Paris Saint-Germain sensationally destroyed Barcelona 4-0 at the Parc des Princes in their Champions League last 16 first leg yesterday.

Di Maria, the former Real Madrid star, opened the scoring in the 18th minute and curled in another 10 minutes into the second half to celebrate his 29th birthday in style. January signing Julian Draxler also netted in between while Edinson Cavani marked his 30th birthday by adding his name to the scoresheet in the 71st minute in the French capital.

Barcelona were completely stunned, the defeat their biggest European humiliation since losing 7-0 on aggregate to Bayern Munich in the semi-finals in 2013.

They are now staring at a first exit from the competition before the quarter-finals in a decade, unless they can pull off a miraculous escape in the second leg at the

Camp Nou next month. This was PSG's night, though, and Unai Emery's side will surely go on to secure a fifth successive appearance in the quarter-finals. PSG had twice been eliminated from the Champions League at the hands of Barcelona in the last four seasons, and the Catalans also had a fearsome record in games against sides coached by Emery, losing just one of 23 before this. But Luis Enrique's team, for all the brilliance of Lionel Messi, have recently looked more fragile than in a long time and the French champions showed no fear.

They were without injured captain Thiago Silva and the suspended Thiago Motta, meaning a start for Adrien Rabiot in midfield and a Champions League debut in defence for 21-year-old Presnel Kimpembe.

Draxler also made his European debut for the club and the German was superb as PSG pressed Barcelona high right from the off—the home side had already

worked Marc-Andre ter Stegen in the Barca goal before they got the opener.

The menacing Draxler was fouled just outside the area and Di Maria bent the resulting free-kick over the wall and in for his third goal in the Champions League this season. Crooked following an early foul by Rabiot, Neymar was off the field receiving treatment as the Parc des Princes crowd erupted.

He was able to continue, but the visitors were lacklustre, Luis Suarez starved of service, Messi quiet and skipper Andres Iniesta struggling to cope.

One Neymar acceleration did lead to an Andre Gomes shot that was turned behind by Kevin Trapp, but otherwise the chances were at the other end.

Ter Stegen saved from Draxler after a counterattack, but there was nothing he could do as the German made it 2-0 five minutes from half-time, exchanging passes

with Marco Verratti and rifling a shot past the goalkeeper from the right side of the area.

The expectation was that Barcelona would come out fighting after the restart but instead they fell further behind in the 55th minute to a piece of brilliance from Di Maria.

The move started with Trapp rolling a goal-kick out to Rabiot on the edge of his own box and the midfielder turning away under pressure from Messi. It ended with Di Maria curling a left-foot shot high into the top-left corner of the net from the edge of the other area.

Di Maria then came off to a standing ovation, but Paris were not finished. Thomas Meunier surged forward from right-back and set up Cavani, who thumped home his 34th goal of the season in all competitions. A miserable night for Barcelona was compounded when Samuel Umtiti hit the post late on. — AFP

BENFICA SNEAK CLASSIC WIN AS AUBAMEYANG FLUFFS DORTMUND

LISBON: Benfica pulled off a classic smash and grab job as they beat Borussia Dortmund 1-0 in their Champions League last 16 first leg yesterday.

Greek striker Kostas Mitroglou scored the only goal of the game, prodding home from close range at the second attempt just after half time after Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Burki stopped his initial effort.

Benfica goalkeeper Ederson, who has relegated former Brazil first choice shot-stopper Julio Cesar to the bench this season, was the star of the show making a slew of crucial saves. But Dortmund will have many regrets after a wasteful performance, in particular from striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang who had a torrid evening, missing three gilt-edged opportunities.

Dortmund had the first clear chance of the night on 10 minutes as French youngster Ousmane Dembele slipped Aubameyang in on goal, but the Gabon striker lifted his shot not only over Ederson but also the bar.

Dortmund were well on top in the early stages but poor control cost Raphael Guerreiro and Erik Durm when well placed to shoot.

The visitors then fashioned a chance with Guerreiro picking out Dembele 10 yards from goal but reported Manchester United target Victor Lindelof bravely threw himself in front of the shot to deflect the ball behind for a corner.

Dortmund should have gone in front on 38 minutes when Benfica centre-back Ljubomir Fejsa dallied allowing Guerreiro

to cross from the byline. But with Ederson stranded, Aubameyang was inches away from converting the ball into an empty net from two yards out.

Moments later, Ederson was a relieved man to see Italian referee Nicola Rizzoli wave away Dortmund protests after the goalkeeper clattered into Dembele on the edge of his box.

Having produced nothing in the first half, Benfica went in front three minutes into the second after Mitroglou was left unmarked two yards out to poke home Luisao's header from a Pizzi corner.

Thereafter, the one-way traffic continued heading towards the home goal was relentless.

Ederson saved a point-blank effort from Dembele inside the six yard box before Aubameyang lifted a carbon copy of his first half chance again just over the bar. Ederson made smart stops to deny Marco Reus and then Lukasz Piszczek before Dortmund were given a lifeline when Fejsa handled a cross from Marc Bartra. But Aubameyang's miserable night continued with a woeful penalty stroked nonchalantly down the middle that the static Ederson merely punched clear. Aubameyang was put out of his misery a few minutes later as coach Thomas Tuchel replaced him with Andre Schuerle just past the hour mark.

Dortmund continued to press but Reus hooked a volley wide before Ederson showed lightning reactions to save one-handed from a Christian Pulisic volley that took a wicked deflection. — AFP



LISBON: Dortmund's midfielder Julian Weigl (L) vies with Benfica's Chilean forward Andre Carillo during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match SL Benfica vs Borussia Dortmund at the Luz stadium in Lisbon yesterday — AFP